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US. Mission Uganda - Typhoid Info Podcast with CDC Director

Presenter: Following the recent outbreak of typhoid in Kampala and some parts of the neighboring districts of Wakiso and Mukono, the U.S. Mission in Uganda has decided to have Dr. Steven Wiersma, the Director for Disease Control, CDC in Uganda, to throw more light about the disease. My first question is, what is typhoid, and how does a person contract the disease?

Dr. Steven Wiersma: Okay, typhoid fever is a disease caused by a bacteria. The bacteria is called *Salmonella typhi*. But the way you get it is if you ingest, or eat food, or take drinks that have been contaminated by feces or urine from someone who is also infected. So this kind of thing can happen anywhere where typhoid is common. And not having a source of clean water is a big problem, a place where people can't wash the hands, they can easily contaminate the food that other people are eating, so that's a big problem.

So once the salmonella bacteria that cause typhoid fever have entered your body through the food or drink, they can multiply, and they cause a bloodstream infection. That infection causes high fevers and many other signs or symptoms. Common signs and symptoms include pain of your stomach, vomiting, diarrhea, even constipation. You can also feel very weak, have a headache, maybe have loss of appetite, and some people even have spots on their chest.

Presenter: How does a person get tested for typhoid, and how is it treated?

Dr. Steven Wiersma: The only way to know for sure if you have typhoid is if you have a stool sample or a blood sample tested for typhoid, and there are quite a number of labs around the country that can test for this. They do that by confirming the presence of that bacteria, either in your blood or in another body fluid. Typhoid fever is treated with antibiotics, and there are certain ones that are very effective against typhoid.

And also, I need to mention that typhoid is potentially life threatening. As many as twenty percent, that's two out of ten, or one out of five people, could actually die as a result of their typhoid infection, so it's very important that people understand the seriousness of this disease and seek prompt treatment.

Presenter: How is the U.S. government helping the Ministry of Health to combat the disease?

Dr. Steven Wiersma: Well initially, before we even knew there was an outbreak of typhoid, the Ministry became aware of an outbreak of an unusual disease in the community around Kampala. Fortunately, the government had started a new disease detective training program, with support from the Centers for Disease Control, and these new disease detectives went out into the communities and were able to find out what the cause of this unusual illness was. And with the help of laboratory sciences in the government and the university hospitals, they were able to confirm the diagnosis as typhoid.

The government has asked for additional expert help, so CDC is bringing in a number of experts. Some have already arrived in country. These include laboratory experts and other disease detectives that will work side by side with Ugandan staff.

Presenter: And finally, what steps can Ugandans take in order to avoid and prevent contraction of typhoid in our communities?

Dr. Steven Wiersma: Well, there's two basic, simple actions that people can take to protect themselves and their families from typhoid fever. You should avoid risky foods and drinks, and get vaccinated against typhoid fever if they have access to those vaccines. But watching what you eat and drink is as important as being vaccinated.

How do you know if a food is risky? Like I said, if it's prepared in a place where there's not a lot of hygiene, where the water may be contaminated, where a sick individual may be serving the food. So people should be thinking about those things, especially when they are buying street foods.

Typhoid vaccines aren't completely effective, but if someone can get one, they are very useful at reducing the risk. But again, you know, avoiding risky foods is something we can all do, even if we don't have ready access to vaccines. And it will help protect us from not only typhoid, but other diseases that cause diarrhea, like cholera, dysentery, Hepatitis A, and many others that are spread through the same route.

Here are some tips regarding food and beverages. If you want to make sure your water is safe, you can buy bottled water from a known source of bottled water. The Ministry of Health has determined that most of those commercial bottled water products are safe. Or you can boil it. We say that it should be at a high boil for over a minute, and then cooled, of course, before you drink it.

If you are drinking in an establishment, it's probably better to take your drink without any ice, because the ice could be just as contaminated as the drink, itself.

It's important that people eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and they're still served hot, not after they've cooled for some time where they could have been contaminated by the dirty hands of a food server. It's important to avoid raw vegetables and fruits unless they've been peeled, carefully peeled, by clean hands. And some leafy green vegetables can be easily contaminated, so you may want to wash those very particularly. If you do eat raw fruit or vegetables that can be peeled, peel them yourself, and make sure you wash your hands before you do that. As I said before, some of the street foods from the street vendors can be particularly risky, and so you should try to avoid that kind of exposure.

Presenter: Thank you very much, Dr. Steven Wiersma.

Dr. Steven Wiersma: You are very welcome.

